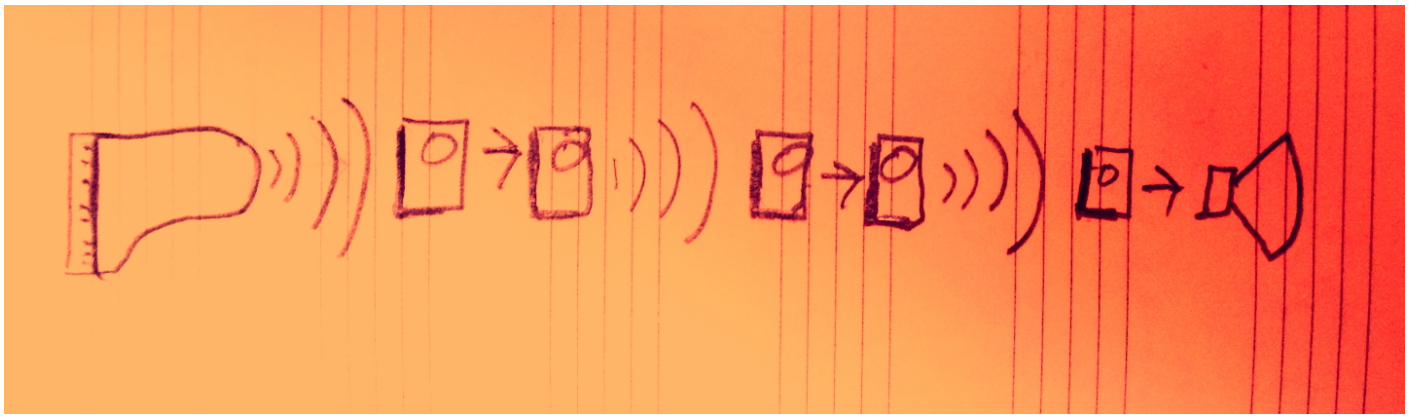
Rusty Banks

Babbling Tower-to-Tower

Toy Piano and (4 or more) cell phones



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Toy Piano and Cell Phones

Notes:

"Babbling Tower-to-Tower" is a work for toy piano and that other toy that has been a defining part of the "aughties," the cell phone. For this piece I decided to eschew the many capabilities of the cell phone and use what might be the most neglected feature or "app" available on these devices-- the actual 'phone' part of the cell phone. Actually, I am making use of the limitations of cell phones, namely their low fidelity and that amount of delay it takes for sound to enter the phone, be transmitted to a tower, relayed to another tower, then back to another phone. While this low sound quality and lack of immediacy are probably things phone makers and service providers are working to remedy, there are some lovely sonic possibilities in these defects.

This piece begins with phone 1 (on mute) inside the toy grand piano with the lid up. That phone is in a call with phone 2 (connected to a small speaker) that is behind and to the side of the audience. Near that speaker is phone 3 in a call to phone 4 on the other side of the room. Phone 4 is also connected to a small speaker. The pianist plays for a minute or so, then un-mutes phone 1 (measure 57), and closes the piano lid. With phone 1 un-muted, every sound the pianist makes is delayed around the audience in a grainy echo. Depending on the size and layout of the performance space, more pairs of phones can be added to this chain to get more echoes and cover more space.

On one hand, this set-up represents the world's least expensive live sound processing. Cell phone are everywhere and with a few friends (even non-musicians!) the gear for this work is easy to find. On the other hand, this set-up is one of the most expensive sound processors ever. It requires phone towers, relay networks, and possibly even satellites to generate the desired results.

"Babbling Tower-to-Tower" was commissioned by NakedEye Ensemble and is dedicated to Ju-Ping Song, who premiered the work in Lancaster, PA on May 27, 2011.

"Babbling Tower-to-Tower" was selected as winner of the 4th UnCaged Toy Piano Competition (2011).

for Ju-Ping Song

Babbling Tower-to-Tower

toy piano and four (or more) cell phones

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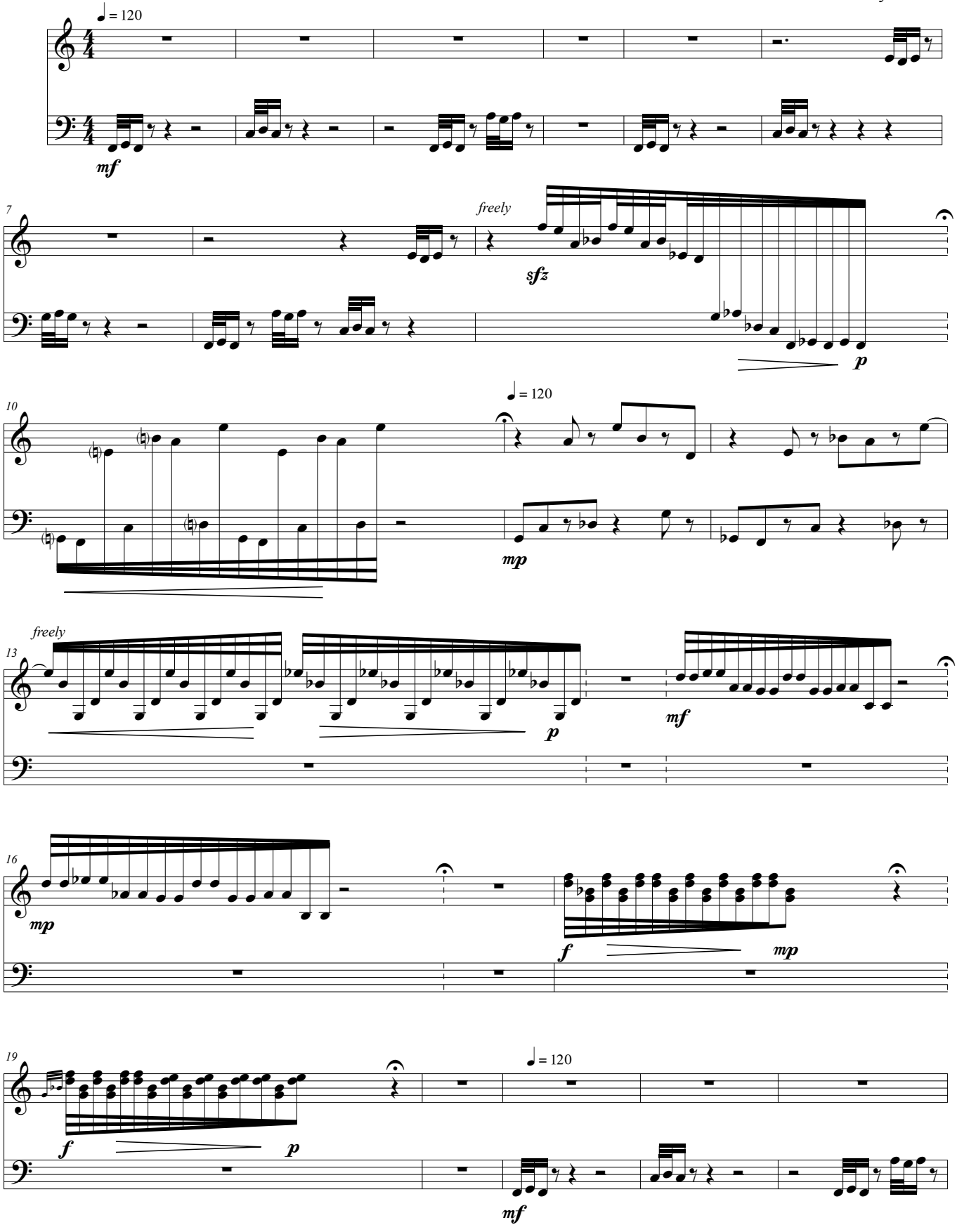
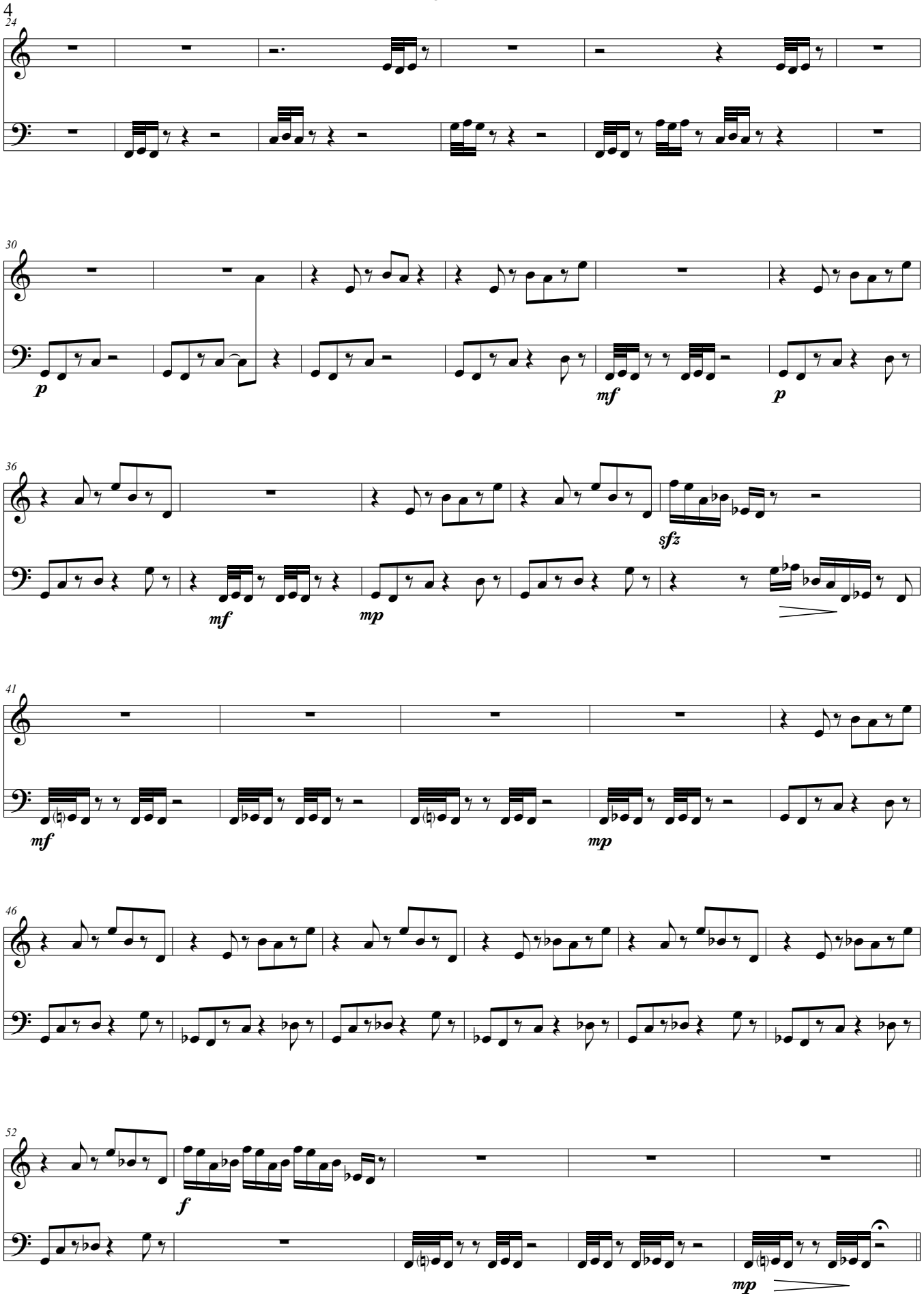
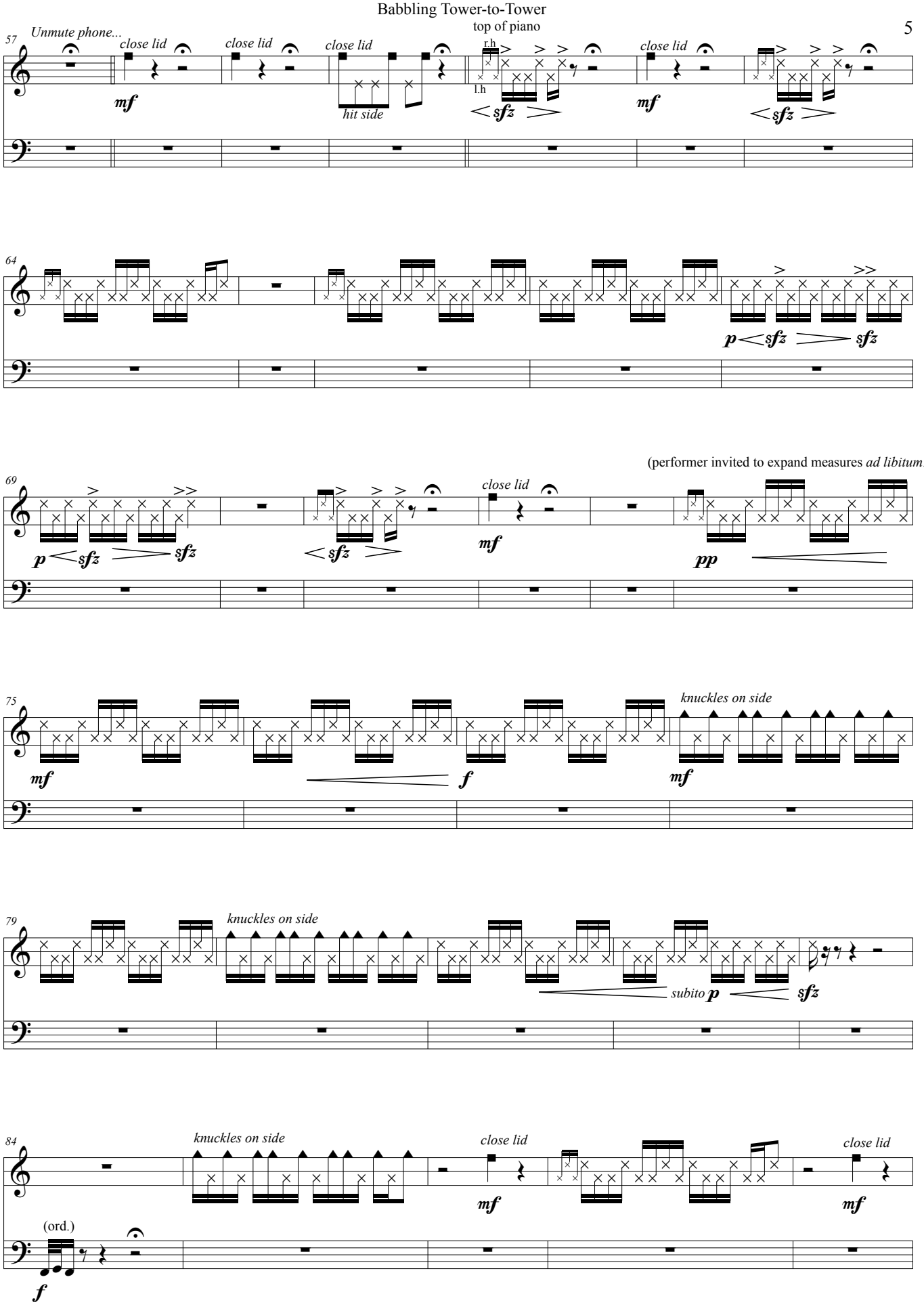
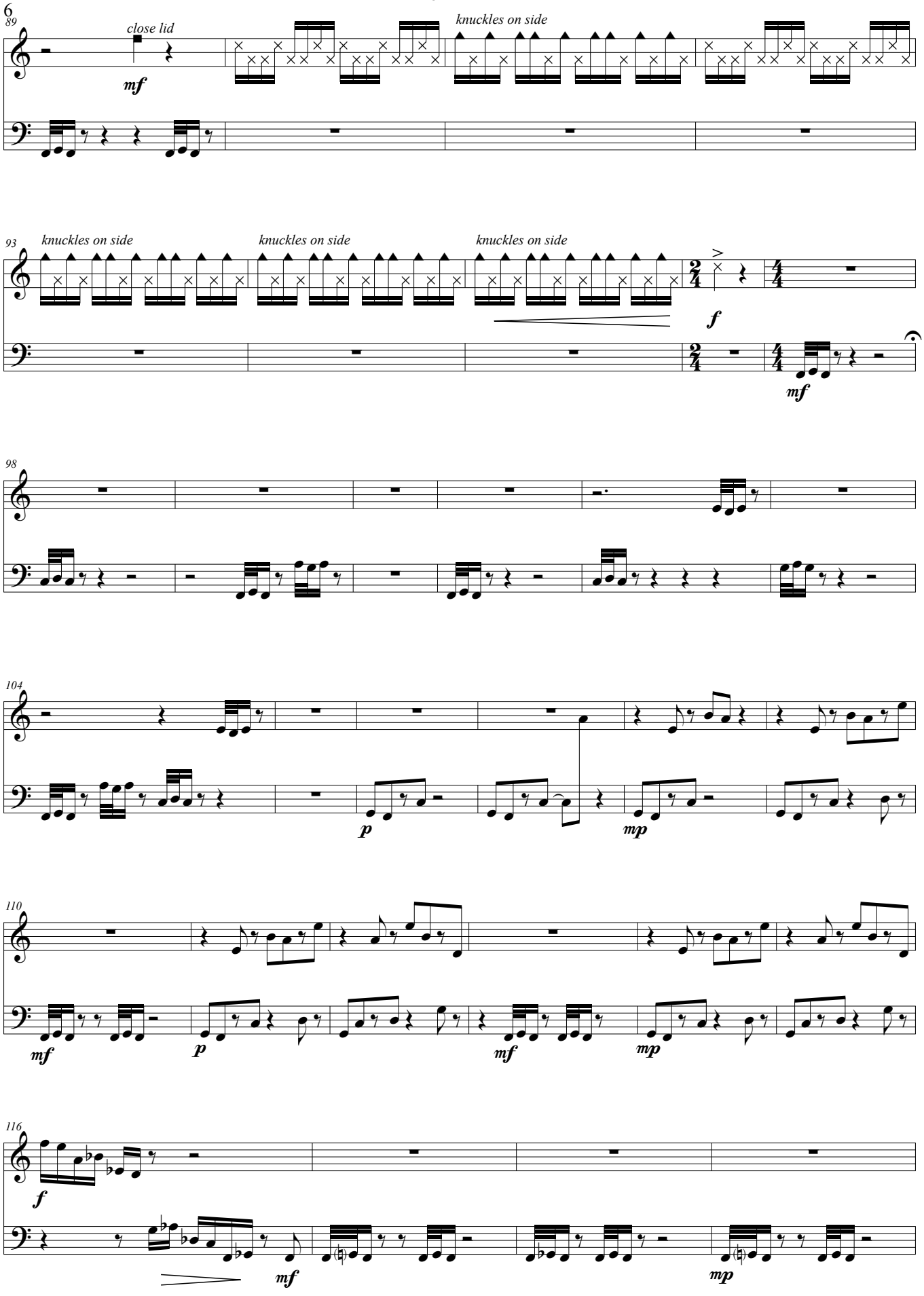
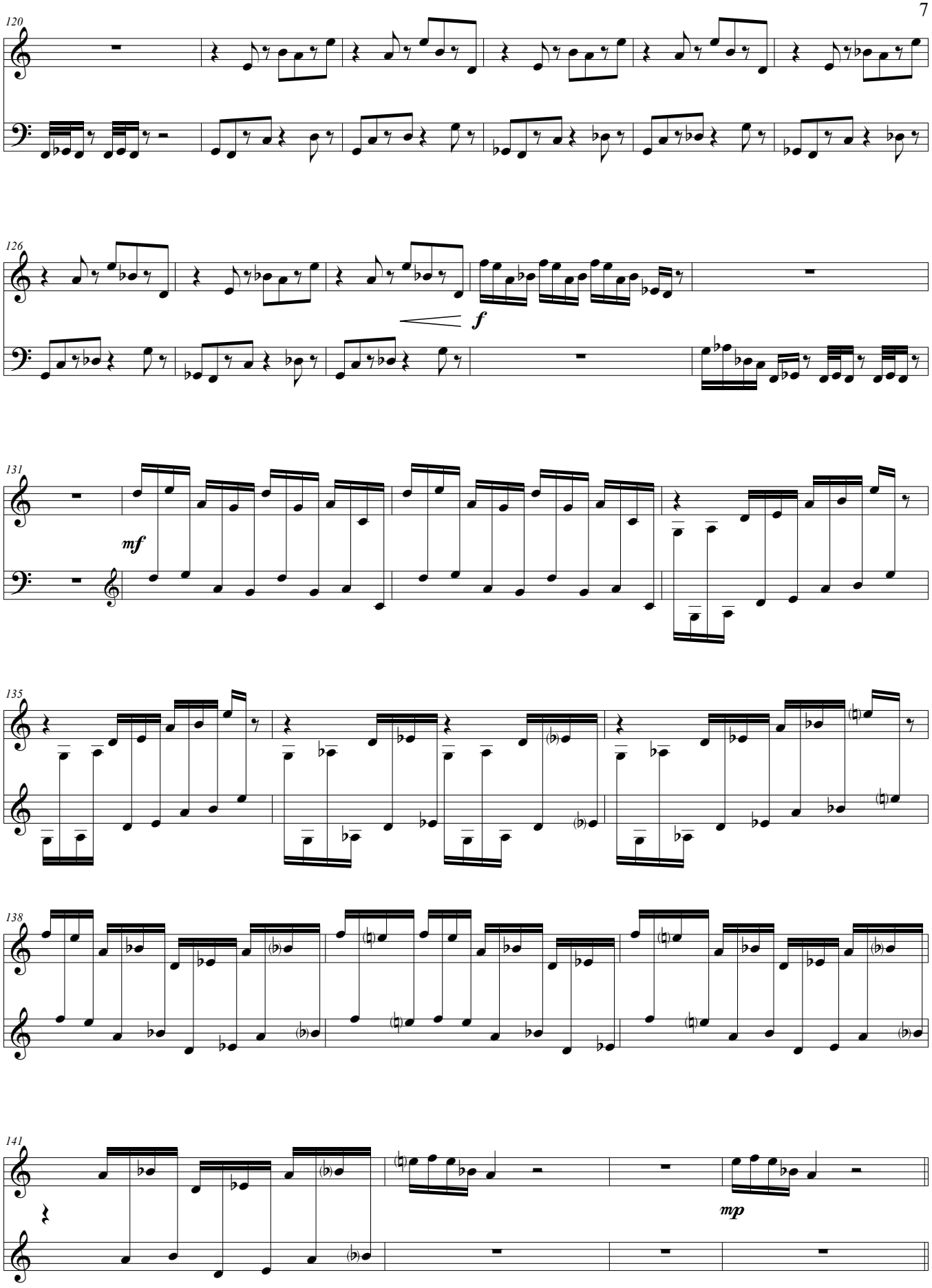


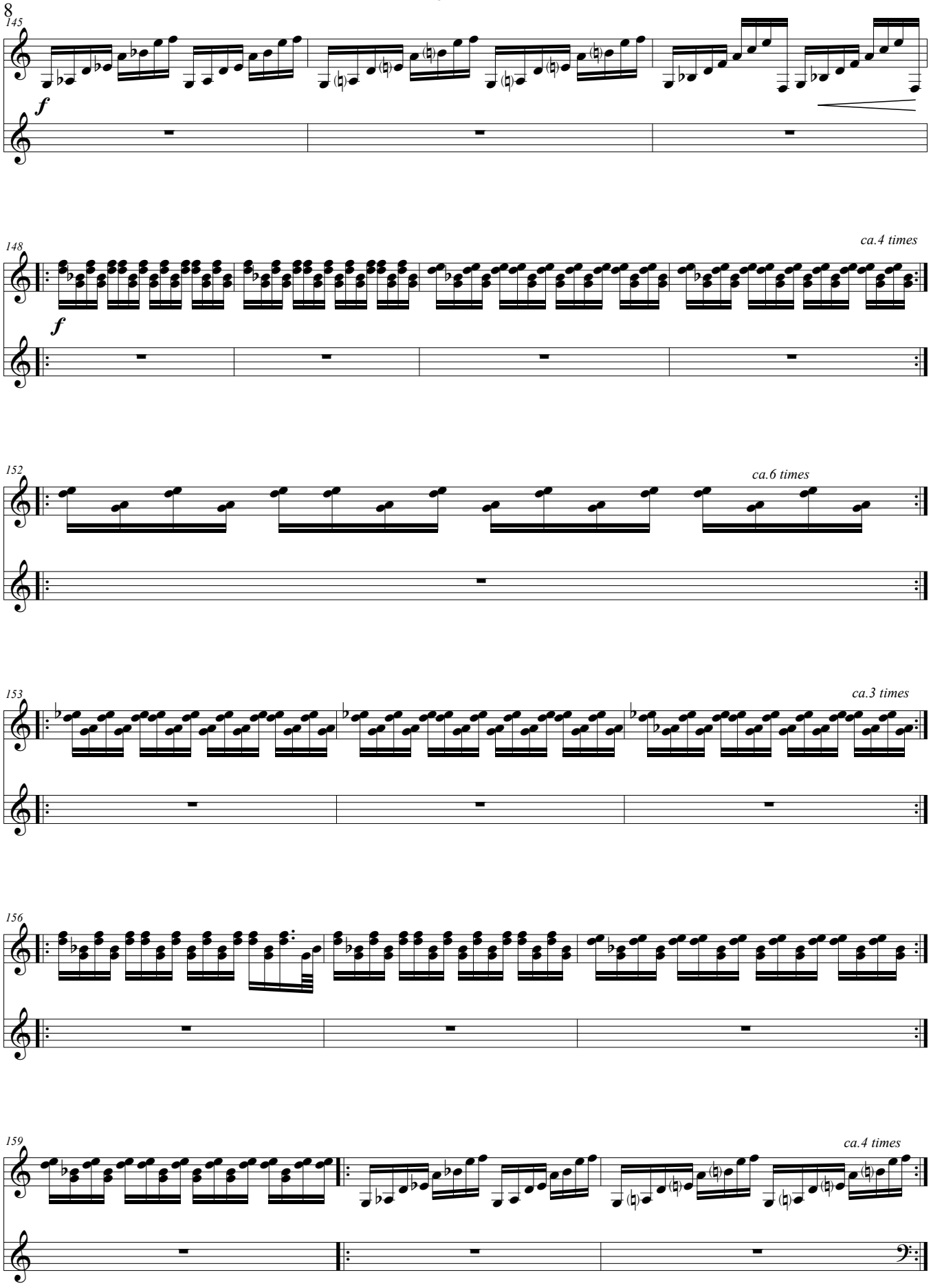
Feo2 Music © 2011 (BMI)

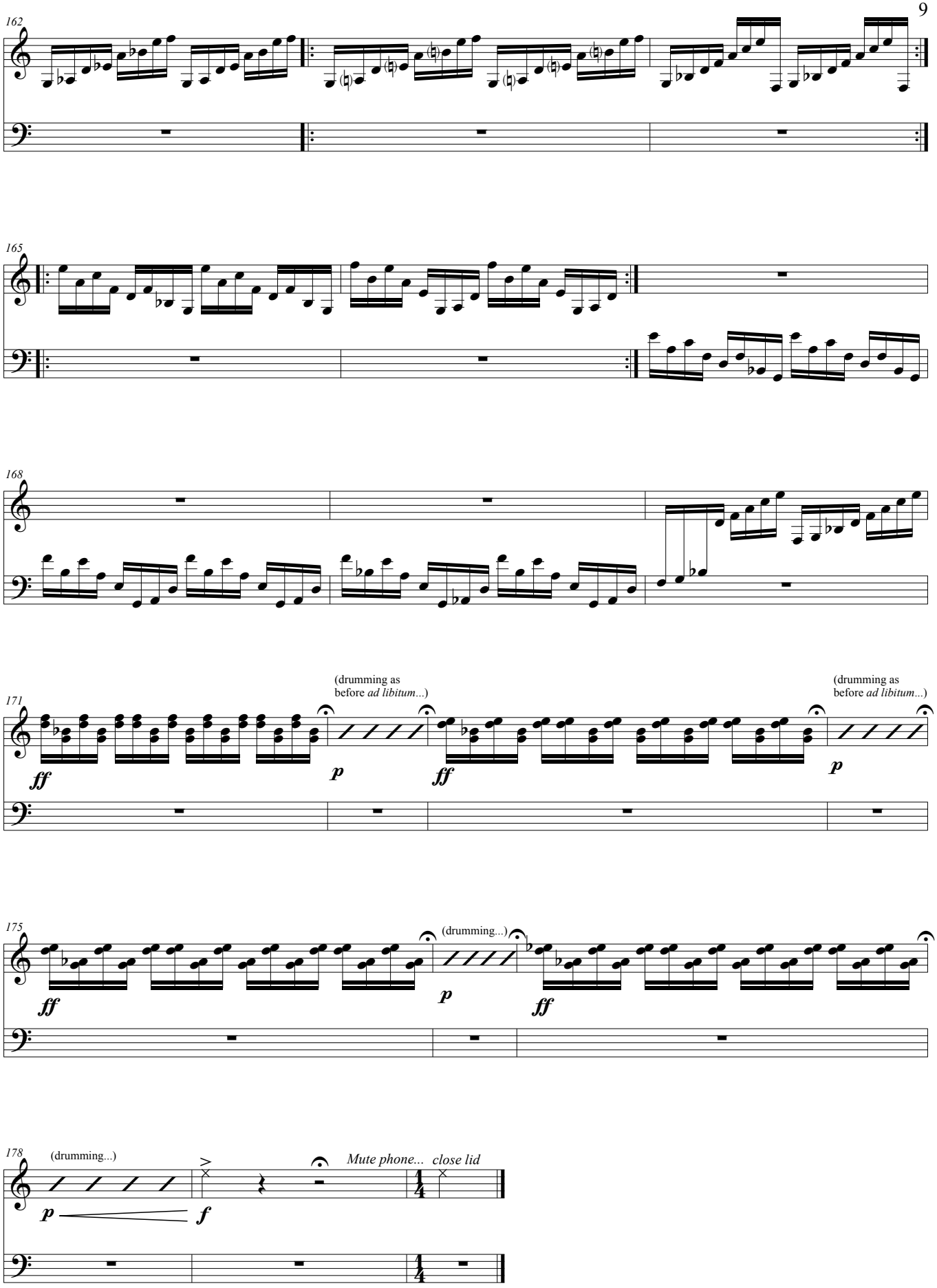

24
30
p
mf
p
36
sfz
mf
mp
41
mf
mp
46
52
f
mp


57
Unmute phone...
close lid
close lid
close lid
hit side
top of piano
r.h
l.h
close lid
64
69
close lid
(performer invited to expand measures ad libitum...)
75
knuckles on side
79
knuckles on side
subito p
84
knuckles on side
close lid
close lid
(ord.)


89
close lid
mf
knuckles on side
93
knuckles on side
knuckles on side
knuckles on side
f
mf
98
104
p
mp
110
mf
p
mf
mp
116
f
mf
mp


120
126
f
131
mf
135
138
141
mp


145
f
148
ca.4 times
f
152
ca.6 times
153
ca.3 times
156
159
ca.4 times


162
165
168
171
(drumming as before *ad libitum*...)
(drumming as before *ad libitum*...)
175
(drumming...)
178
(drumming...)
Mute phone... close lid